

Alastair Campbell not as black as he was painted

He was once asked by a journalist over in New Zealand what it was like being 'an anti-christ type of figure'. Yet the man who engendered almost as many column inches as his boss when communications director for British Prime Minister Tony Blair, came over as very different to his public persona.

Alastair Campbell was speaker at a recent Celebrity Lunch organised by Azur Productions where *The Riviera Times* caught up with him. He was in town to promote the Leukaemia Research fund to which he donated his speaker's fee. In the last few years he's raised over a million pounds for the charity participating in marathons and triathlons.

At 6' 3" he strikes an imposing figure with, one suspects, energy to burn. Since leaving politics in 2003, his main income derives from public speaking and writing, although he still advises and fundraises for the Labour Party in a voluntary capacity.

Does he miss the cut and thrust of politics? 'In some ways yes, but I do it in a different way. For example, I went back for the last election. What I don't miss is all the attention and the press.'

By his own admission he is 'very black and white' and 'a bit prone to doing things in excess'. It explains why within 15 minutes of taking up jogging with his children he decided straight off to do the London marathon and raised £350,000. Leukaemia Research suggested the switch to triathlons as being under-



Alastair Campbell with the press

exploited. 'We are now the biggest benefactor by a long way, with around 3,000 triathletes. We persuade them to raise money and in return we support them as athletes.'

During our chat, he's been trading friendly insults with Cathy Gilman of the fund: 'When we started, 45 years ago any kind of blood cancer was fatal,' she says. 'Today, around 80 per cent of kids survive and 30-50 per cent of adults.' The charity needs to raise £22 million a year to maintain its current research programme - and they clearly adore Mr Campbell.

Final question - when will Tony Blair go? He laughs: 'I really don't know! All I do know is that he has been and continues to be an extraordinary political leader.'

At this point the man credited with taking 'spin' to new heights has a serious few words to say, dare one say rant, about the British press for whom he has little respect. But for this journalist it was a great pleasure to meet him.

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